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ABSTRACT

An attempt was made to create a profile of students at risk of disconnecting from school or being disconnected. In this study, 1,853 grade school students were evaluated by their teachers on the Potential Dropout Checklist (PDOC) (T. Parish and J. Parish, 1993), an instrument that offers 20 items believed to discern trouble spots or problem behaviors. Teachers also completed the Revised Personal History Inventory for Children (RPHIC) (T. Raish and S. Wigle, 1985), which is designed to assess the functionality of various support systems in students' lives. The two items on the PHIC most often found to be associated with PDOC problem spots and problem behaviors were inadequate supervision when not in school and uncaring or hostile parents. Other items on the PDOC were associated with RPHIC support student failures. These included: (1) poor attendance; (2) no participation in extracurricular activities; (3) below average scholastic achievement; (4) poor home environment; (5) poor self-image; and (6) teachers believing that the student might drop out. Taken together, these associations form a profile for disconnection. The PDOC is attached. (SLD)

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Determining a "Profile" of "Disconnected" Students

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Abstract

Some students, more so than others, are at risk of "disconnecting" or being "disconnected" from school. This report of research will seek to determine the "profile" of those students who are more at risk of experiencing the "disconnection" process. Teachers, counselors, and administrators are urged to identify these "profiled" students, and then to take appropriate steps to "reconnect" them to a secure and functional school-based support net.

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Determining a "Profile" of "Disconnected" Students

Many of our nation's youth seem to be "disconnecting from" or are "being disconnected from" school and society generally. Perhaps students simply find their schools to be uninviting" (Hansen & Childs, 1998), or feel like they are among those who have been "disinvited" (Purkey & Novak, 1996). Another explanation, however, was offered by Parish and Parish (1993) when they suggested that it may be that these youth are generally more exposed to various life circumstances such as parental divorce, parental remarriage, abuse, peer rejection, poverty and/or negative geographic mobility. Often these youth feel that they don't "fit in," or that they are not accepted by others. Because they are often not "in" their teachers', administrators', or classmates' "Quality Worlds" (Glasser, 1997), it is quite easy to understand how they might become "disconnected."

What indicants can we readily point to that will help us to identify students who are at risk of disconnecting or being disconnected? Well, in the present study, 1853 grade school students enrolled in a large Rocky Mountain school district were evaluated by their teachers on the Potential Dropout Checklist (PDOC; Parish & Parish, 1993; see Table 1) which offers twenty items that are believed to discern various trouble spots, or problem behaviors that are more likely to be manifested by students undergoing the "disconnection" process. In addition, teachers also completed the Revised Personal History Inventory for Children (RPHIC; Parish & Wigle, 1985; see Table 2) which consists of eight items that are believed to assess the functionality of various support systems in students' lives.

What appears in Table 3 is a summary table of information with the RPHIC items across the top and the PDOC items along the left margin, broken down by percentage of students who experienced either functional or dysfunctional ratings for each item on the RPHIC. The asterisks within the cells indicate that the percentage of students manifesting the PDOC trouble spot or problem behavior and the dysfunctional life circumstance was significantly greater than the percentage of those manifesting the PDOC trouble spot or problem behavior and the non-dysfunctional life circumstance. The numbers in parentheses following each PDOC trouble spot or problem behavior refer to the total number of dysfunctional life circumstances significantly more often associated with the items. The numbers along the bottom of Table 3 indicate the total number of items on the PDOC that were significantly associated with each RPHIC dysfunctional support system.

Simply summarized, the two items on the PHIC most often found to be associated with PDOC problem spots / problem behaviors at school were 1) Inadequate supervision when not in school (16 out of 20 problem spots/behaviors discerned), and 2) Parents uncaring or hostile (15 out of 20 problem spots / behaviors discerned). However, unsupportive peers, family financial hardship, geographic mobility, parental death, and parental divorce or separation were also associated with 11, 10, 7, 7, and 6 PDOC trouble spots / problem behaviors, respectively. A total of 6 out of 20 of the trouble spots / behaviors listed on the PDOC were found to be associated with at least 6 RPHIC support system failures. The indicators that are most often associated with students who were deemed to be at risk of dropping out of school were the following:

- Poor attendance / tardiness record
- Not in extra-curricular activities
- Below average scholastic achievement
- Poor home environment
- Poor self-image
- Teachers believing that the student might drop out.

As one puts these two sets of findings together, one should quickly realize that this is the "profile" for student "disconnection," and that having acquired such information, teachers, counselors and administrators need to re-double their efforts to "connect" with their students before they drop-out (i.e., before they "disconnect" from school) or are expelled (i.e., before they are "disconnected" from school).

References

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Table 1: Potential Dropouts Checklist (PDOC)

List of Identifying Characteristics

Does this pupil stand out on the characteristics listed below when compared with the rest of the class? *Yes*_____ *No*_____

Please circle the number of all statements that pertain to the student in question.

1. Is two years older than his/her classmates.
2. Has a poor attendance or tardiness record.
3. Is reading below his/her grade level.
4. Resists aggressively the authority of the teacher or principal.
5. Has little or no interest in school.
6. Is ignored or actively disliked by pupils or teachers.
7. Is not able financially to do what the rest of the group does.
8. Is not in any extracurricular activities.
9. Refuses to participate in gym activities; refuses to get undressed; stands on the sidelines.
10. Is passed on to the next grade on a trial basis because of marks.
11. Student changes schools frequently.
12. Has been retained one or more years in school.
13. Has an older brother or sister that has dropped out of school.
14. Below average scholastic achievement.
15. Closest friends are out of school.
16. Disciplinary record includes expulsion, suspension, or warning of suspension.
17. Parents'attitude toward dropping out of school is one of indifference or they actually encourage it.
18. Poor home environment.
19. Student has a poor self-image.
20. You have a feeling that the student might drop out of school; not any one thing you can put your finger on, just the feeling that the student might drop out.

Table 2: The Revised Personal History Inventory for Children (RPHIC)

Instructions: please respond to the following questions by indicating either yes or no in the appropriate spaces.

In your estimation:

1. Do the child's parents act in either an uncaring or hostile fashion toward the child? Yes_____ No_____

2. Does the child receive adequate supervision when he/she is not in school? Yes_____ No_____

3. Have you and your fellow teachers generally shown concern for the child's welfare? Yes_____ No_____

4. Have the child's peers been supportive of him/her? Yes_____ No_____

5. Has the child's family experienced a great deal of geographic mobility? Yes_____ No_____

6. Has the child's family experienced a great deal of financial hardship? Yes_____ No_____

7. Have the child's parents separated or gotten a divorce? Yes_____ No_____

8. Have one or both of the child's parents died? Yes_____ No_____

Table 3: Discerning the Percentage of Responses Associated with Support System Dysfunctionality and Potential Dropout Trouble Areas / Problem Behaviors

Potential Dropouts Checklist (PDOC)	Personal History Inventory for Children (PHIC) – Support Systems															
	Parents uncaring or hostile		Inadequately supervised when not in school		Teachers show concern for child's Welfare		Peers supportive of student		Experienced a great deal geographic mobility		Family experienced great financial Hardship		Parents separated or divorced		One or both parents died	
	Y%	N%	Y%	N%	Y%	N%	Y%	N%	Y%	N%	Y%	N%	Y%	N%	Y%	N%
1. Two years older than classmates (0)	06	01	06	01	01	02	01	05	03	01	04	01	03	01	06	02
2. Poor attendance/tardiness record (7)	*20	05	*22	05	06	07	04	*17	*13	04	*18	03	*11	03	*21	06
3. Reading below grade level (5)	*29	12	*35	11	10	17	13	*24	17	13	*23	11	*20	12	22	14
4. Resists authority (3)	*17	03	*17	03	03	05	02	*14	06	03	08	03	05	02	06	03
5. Little or no interest in school (4)	*24	07	*41	06	07	09	06	*24	15	07	*20	06	12	06	16	08
6. Ignored/disliked by pupils/teachers (4)	*22	03	*24	03	02	06	01	*27	07	04	*11	03	07	04	09	04
7. Unable to keep up financially (5)	*22	03	*19	03	02	05	07	*14	10	03	*18	01	08	02	*12	04
8. Not in extracurricular activities (6)	*26	08	*27	08	08	10	07	*26	*18	07	*25	06	13	07	*12	04
9. Does not participate in gym class (0)	01	00	04	00	00	01	02	03	01	00	02	00	01	01	05	00
10. Passed on trial basis to next grade (2)	*09	02	*11	02	01	03	01	07	04	02	07	02	05	01	05	02
11. Changes schools frequently (3)	*12	02	*12	01	02	04	02	08	*16	01	08	02	06	01	05	03
12. Retained one or more years (2)	*10	03	*11	03	02	05	03	09	06	03	06	03	05	03	09	04
13. Older sibling dropped out of school (0)	03	01	06	01	01	02	01	04	03	01	04	01	03	01	05	01
14. Below average scholastic achievement (7)	*37	13	*46	12	11	19	13	*30	*22	14	*29	11	*22	12	*29	15
15. Closest friends out of school (0)	08	01	08	01	01	02	01	06	04	02	04	01	03	01	08	01
16. Has been expelled, suspended or warned (1)	06	02	*11	02	02	02	02	07	04	01	04	02	03	01	05	02
17. Parents encourage dropping out (2)	*12	01	*13	01	01	03	01	06	05	01	07	01	03	01	09	02
18. Poor home environment (7)	*36	02	*35	02	02	07	03	*17	*11	04	*21	02	*12	02	*16	04
19. Poor self-image (7)	*33	08	*36	08	06	16	08	*28	*16	09	*26	08	*18	07	*23	10
20. Teacher believes the student might drop out (7)	*30	07	*40	06	06	12	08	*27	*17	07	*25	05	*16	05	*25	08
• Number of items on the PDOC that were significantly associated with the PHIC dysfunctional support system	15		16		0		11		7		10		6		7	

( ) Refers to the total number of PHIC dysfunctional life circumstances significantly associated with the PDOC trouble spot or problem behavior.

****Indicates that the percentage of students manifesting the PDOC trouble spot or problem behavior and the dysfunctional life circumstance was significantly greater than those manifesting the PDOC trouble spot or problem behavior and the alternate functional life circumstance.***